CORPORATER

Software Vendor

Selection Guide

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Vendor Selection Process

What does your software buying process look like? Are you still using the traditional approach, where you start with an RFI, followed by an RFQ containing a long list of functional and technical requirements? While this has been the standard way of purchasing solutions in the past, the world is changing—because customers are using solutions in new and different ways.

Business applications versus reports and dashboards

In the past, solutions for performance management, risk, quality, compliance, portfolio management, and other domains were essentially covered by specialized dashboards or reporting systems. These were designed to visualize and present data in a way that fit the management domain.

Today's best-in-breed companies now use *business apps* for their specialized management domains. The difference between software and apps is not as subtle as it seems. Apps are about enabling end-users to complete specific tasks and activities or to achieve some sort of outcome. Software is all about enabling a computer to do certain things. Apps focus on the user. The software focuses on the hardware and machines.

Business applications can also contain reports and dashboards, but today's businesses need much more than just reports and dashboards to manage things. A dashboard is not the whole solution. This is why you need a platform for configuring your business applications. These business apps are the elements within the solution that help users actually do things. These activities are performed to achieve a higher business purpose.

The need for dynamic applications

Business apps address very dynamic business rules and conditions. For example, if you are making an improvement initiative, you might follow a process to build a business case, allocate resources, approve it, execute it, then track the benefits that it delivers. We need an initiative that can function in multiple ways. A static form or structure is no longer sufficient. The better approach is to use a dynamic initiative that shifts focus, structure, stakeholders, business rules, access control, and purpose throughout its lifecycle.

Customers need more control and flexibility than ever to configure smart objects that deliver the right business value and user experience. It is no longer adequate to base the purchase process upon functional specifications. When assessed in isolation from the actual user stories, functional specifications do not tell the whole picture. Asking if the solution contains any of a long list of features does little to describe how well these features can interact with each other to help end-users in going about their activities and tasks within the system. Nor do lists of features indicate the ease at which they are configured, managed and maintained.

A more modern approach to vendor selection

Rather than using a traditional RFP approach to selecting vendors, we recommend mixing and matching other vendor interactions to give you a more comprehensive picture.

Workshops

Ask vendors to run workshops where they present the solution. Focus most of your time on the issues most critical for how you plan to use the solution and use a few control questions that can be used to address general issues, such as how you configure objects that are displayed on the web.

User stories

Focus on user stories when possible - use a role-based description of what you want to achieve, and anchor it to a business purpose. This will tell a much richer story, and it may give you better and unexpected ideas for solving business problems than you originally envisioned. You trust expert configurers to solve the problem, rather than specifying the solution yourself.

Technical and functional requirements

Use when necessary. There is no point in creating extra work for vendors, and many technical requirements are simply must-haves.

Interactive demos

Ask vendors to show how things work, how your business rules can be modeled, how the solution is configured. Interactive demos are more effective than scripted demos, because they deal with the solution more holistically, rather than feature by feature.

Ask for best practices

Don't focus entirely on the solutions and features. Rather, challenge the vendor on their subject matter expertise. Challenge vendors in how some of your biggest headaches are solved--- conceptually. A conceptual discussion will give you an indication of how well the vendor understands your business problem. Get a sense of the vendor's experience in working within your solution domain.

Ask for evidence

If something sounds too good to be true, ask for evidence. A good vendor will offer practical solutions and will offer a system grounded in reality. Learn as much as you can from the vendors so you understand their approach, and ensure that you have realistic expectations.

Establish trust

Are you getting the right answers from the right people? Are you dealing with someone who focuses on selling you something? Or are you dealing with a solution expert, with domain knowledge, who gives you the confidence that they can deliver the project?

Talk to various vendors

You will get a much better sense of what a vendor offers, both in terms of the solution, and its delivery, if you can compare them against other vendors.

Pricing

Are there hidden costs? Evaluate the total cost of ownership over time, and get a sense of what the cost limits are. If you might be adding 100s or 1000s of additional users down the road, now is the time to get those price quotes.

Listen to experts

Be flexible. If the vendor has a better way of achieving the same outcome that is cheaper, faster, or easier, but open to using an alternative. Particularly if your project was scoped out internally by employees who are not experts in specifying business applications.

The devil is in the details

Listen to your vendors and their experience when approaching a problem. For example, if you want someone to receive a notification every time someone makes a change to a risk assessment if taken literally, updating the probability, consequence, and status of the plan might count as three edits if this requirement is taken literally, resulting in three notifications. An experienced vendor can help you sort through these details to help you solve the actual business case.

Be skeptical of out-of-the-box solutions

Make certain that you have a clear understanding of what out-of-the-box actually means— in all aspects: the demo, the configuration, the implementation—everything. How does the solution address gaps between what is available out of the box, and what you actually require? How can the configuration grow and evolve if your needs ever change? There are many alternative approaches to out-of-the-box that are also easy to implement and use.

Remain agile

Avoid being a prisoner to your own specification. Be aware of potentially costly traps that you might be creating for yourself in your specification. Many customers often specify business logics that contradicts each other in different parts of the solution. Try to standardize as much of the design as possible to avoid creating exceptions all over the place.

Ask for references

Clearly understand what stage the reference customer is. Are they using the solution, or still implementing it? Don't just focus on the solution, but also get as much information about the implementation, how well the timeline and budget were met, and ask for lessons learned.

Pilot project

Consider a pilot project. A pilot can greatly reduce your risk, or any doubts you may have regarding the product of the implementation. If you select a pilot, create a set of acceptance criteria, with a reasonable timeline. Respect the scope of the pilot project.

Agile implementation

Corporater generally recommends using an implementation approach based on agile. By design, it delivers business value nearly immediately. The solution might not be in production immediately, but demonstratable parts of the project are quickly available and usable. Every two weeks you will be able to test new configurations and demonstrate progress to stakeholders.

We also offer other approaches that meet the unique needs of customers. These can include implementations based on pre-made 'accelerators' (standard configurations that work out of the box), or phased roll-outs (where complex implementations are piloted in a part of the company and roll out in a controlled manner.

By participating in the implementation, your team will quickly gain knowledge of the design and configuration of your solution. This is a far better method of knowledge transfer than general classroom training because it ensures customers are trained on their specific use and configuration.

Regardless of the implementation approach, we recommend a central point of contact that serves as the solution owner. This individual should be familiar with the business case and the user stories that the solution will cover. The solution owner needs to manage the various stakeholders within the organization. This is to ensure that the project stays on-scope.

As a best practice, we highly recommend that the solution owner standardizes the various business processes embedded within the solution. For example, if a company has twelve different ways of assessing risks because stakeholders in various business units cannot agree on a standard approach, the solution will be highly complex to use and maintain, and it will be very difficult to aggregate and report the overall risk situation. With this in mind, we recommend that customers base their user stories in the RFP on using a standardized approach whenever possible.

Solution maintenance

It is important to realize that the go-live date is actually the start of everything—not the end. Your solution will be a living one. All of the elements will follow a lifecycle. This lifecycle determines when these objects are active. For example, a new year might mean a new set of strategic objectives. In Corporater, all objects contain start and end dates. This allows customers to use the same scorecard across multiple planning cycles, but have the content dynamically appear in the reporting periods during which it was alive. Similar concepts can be used on projects, which generally follow more ad-hoc start and end dates.

In addition to content, customers often modify their business rules and workflows over time. This may be due to adding new features, changes in reporting needs or requirements, acquisition of new companies, etc. Most customers are able to manage such change independently, or with some help and guidance from a consultant.

When selecting vendors, it is important to understand how this ongoing maintenance will be handled. This can often be a hidden cost, especially if the solution relies on customized source code, or the solution is highly complex to configure. We recommend that the solution owner handle change management and the evolution of the configuration.

Corporater is available both in the cloud and on-premise. Customers generally have additional environments to configure and test changes to the system. Corporater is designed to allow customers the ability to configure changes to the system directly in the production server if needed.

Corporater offers releases approximately twice a month. Most of these contain new features. When selecting vendors, we recommend looking at both recent release notes as well as the product roadmap to see the level of activity within the business area you require. Domains such as performance management are quite mature and stable in comparison to the domains of governance, risk, and compliance. New regulations and requirements are always emerging. It is important to select a vendor that specializes within your business domain, and that is active in staying ahead of market requirements.

End of service

While unpleasant to think about before the project even launches, we recommend considering what happens if you decide to end your vendor relationship for any reason. Consider asking how easy it is to export all the data from the solution, whether for archiving it, or migrating to another solution.

Writing the RFP

As a vendor that has seen countless RFPs from customers, we have some general guidelines:

Ask for best practices

Allow vendors to exhibit best practices by using user stories when appropriate. These should describe the roles of users and outcomes or activities that are performed by the users, rather than specifying functionality. This approach allows vendors to find the best approach for implementing the best set of features. In addition, many concepts are intertwined when configuring business apps. You may need to address access control, what periods the object is available in when the object is editable, the stakeholders who will interact with the page, etc. Functional specifications address these issues in isolation. A user story will require a harmonized approach to disparate challenges.

Ask for descriptions

Rather than asking yes/no questions, ask vendors to describe how they would solve or address your business requirements. Not only will this give you better information about how the solution works, but it will also give you insights into how well the vendor understands your actual business needs.

Anchor requirements to the business

Categorize the business value if using functional requirements. This anchors your requirement against an outcome or objective. For example, create a category, such as 'streamline reporting process,' and then include individual requirements beneath them. This helps everyone understand the response aims to address the objectives, rather than just ticking off boxes. It also gives vendors room to express best practices or better approaches that the vendor has not considered—that address the business objective directly, even if it is off the mark from the functional requirement.

Promote clarity

Avoid combining too many concepts within a single requirement. This makes it difficult to understand if responses are scored as partially compliant. For example, if you combine 10 requirements into one, and the vendor replies that it is partially met, it is unclear whether it is 10% or 90% met without extra clarifications.

Keep the solution design simple

Keep your vision of the finished solution simple—remember that users will need to adopt and use this solution. A complex solution can quickly turn into a black box, where it is no longer apparent how basic things function. What drives the status gauge? The percentage of target attainment? Or is it a Byzantine labyrinth of business rules that involves elements located all over the solution? Keep it simple!

Be future-minded

Leave room to grow – as a corollary to the previous point, don't make a short-sighted decision that will leave you replacing your solution with something more robust within a year or two. Understand the potential of your solution, and consider where you want to take it in the future.

Keep the RFI simple

Make it easy to respond to your RFP – adding many degrees of must-have, nice to have, desired, etc. makes your intentions unclear. Likewise, offering too many options that define the level of vendor compliance will result in a confusing reply. Always assess the cost of meeting gaps between the solution and the

requirements.

Avoid repetition

If aspects like access control, or reporting are part of each solution area, treat them as separate functional categories, rather than repeating them in each section. List an assumption or a requirement stating that the feature applies throughout the solution.

Keep it relevant

For technical requirements, ask specific questions related to your technical environment.

Use a phased approach

Break the project into phases if you do not plan to implement everything at once. It reduces risk, provides a better basis for cost estimation, and it makes implementation planning more manageable.

Consider using a pilot

Starting the project with a pilot, with a limited scope, and limited roll-out can reduce risks, can validate the overall approach, and can deliver faster results. Using an agile approach, you can rapidly test this with users, and make adjustments more easily, before it is widely in use.

Use a clarification meeting with the vendor to ask control questions for issues that may rely on workaround or coding to solve.

Categories of functionality

Most business systems have functionality that addresses the following categories, however, they are often not all contained within a single system. Customers are then challenged with either functional gaps, a siloed system, or a messy (and often incomplete) integration project in an attempt to digitalize their management processes.

Categories required to drive business outcomes

- **Data** – the actual data that is reported. In a business application, the data also includes business metadata.
- **Analytics** – dynamic visualization of data. This is generally in the form of charts, graphs, and tables. These should be interactive so that end users can work with the data to gain insights to support decisions.
- **Business models** – for a business system to function as an app, it requires various structures that contain business logic, and that users can interact with. This is a key difference in how BI and analytics tools approach reporting—they generally have no business model. Everything is just data and metadata. Metadata is not enough to model business objects, such as KPIs, objectives, risks, projects, activities, etc.
- **Planning** – tools to model the future state, goal, objective, strategic destination, etc. (projects, initiatives, activities, etc.). A robust planning tool kit will also offer approvals and workflows to support various states of the plan.
- **Execution** – tools to govern and control the solution in its present state, with the ability to compare against history.

Organizations can obtain business outcomes when all the above pieces are in place.

Selection criteria

When selecting a tool, make sure that you have enough coverage in all the above areas. Most systems are either an "analytics reporting tool" or a "workflow execution tool" or a "planning tool" and lack the totality of what a business application really needs.

As discussed in the introduction, your community of users requires business applications. Reporting or dashboarding tools can cover the data and analytics areas of the solution, but they are not adequate to cover planning and execution. It is critical that you have the tools to make your system come alive, that you end up with applications that support your end users in their activities related to planning and execution of their strategy, governance, risk, or compliance regime.

By implementing all of these areas on a single platform, you will harmonize the user experience. Tasks or projects will be handled the same way, no matter how or where they are entered. The business rules and access control will be handled consistently. You will avoid complicated integrations.

Business value and requirements:

In your specification section, consider the following categories. These will need to be modified to make them relevant to your intended use of the solution. It is better to focus on the business value you require, rather than focusing on small features.

Modern solutions often have many ways of achieving the same outcome, and it is often better to use experts, and rely on their experience to deliver the best solution—and not just *a* solution that ticks off the boxes in an RFP response.

Data

It is important to understand that data means many different things. It can mean data records in structured data stores, it can be metadata about elements in your system, such as the date a new project was added, or the user who added it, or commentary about performance. All of this can be very important.

- **Quantitative data** is discreet data, usually the numeric values that systems apply math to, data that is aggregated, sliced, diced, drilled, extracted, loaded, exported.
- **Qualitative data** is often overlooked, often because reporting and dashboard tools are not well-equipped to deal with it. Qualitative data can include descriptive text, commentary about performance, descriptive bandwidth data used to describe some types of risks, descriptive text that describes the status of projects and initiatives, matrix-styled survey questions, etc.

Taken a bit further, one might also consider that corrective actions, or even the plans themselves can constitute qualitative data. These are types of business metadata that can be connected to quantitative results.

Automation and human interaction

Since we are still working with business apps, we need to interact with the apps to achieve our desired outcomes. These interactions can be very basic, such as adding a new activity to an improvement initiative. For this to be an excellent user experience, the system needs to provide the end-user with the right input

form, with the right input fields, with the right options, at the right time, and the right place. The context of the form can change, based on how it is used, or when it is used. This requires having an application tool kit that can configure not only the structure of the form, but the behavior.

With Corporater, we offer a basic mode, where you can ignore all the special behaviors, and simply use forms that requires no configuration. However, for special cases, we also offer advanced control over the form behavior.

Since we are discussing business applications, it is natural that end-users need to interact with the app to perform their work. We offer a rich tool kit for configuring these interactions:

- **Surveys -** especially useful for collecting qualitative data.

  If you deal with compliance concepts that require surveys, make sure your solution offers either native survey support, or a factor in the cost of using a third-party tool. Note that many 'free' third-party survey tools are anything but free if you intend to use them professionally, with any degree of security or frequency.

  - Specification: Describe how your solution can distribute and collect surveys from both users and non-users of the solution.
  - *User story: As an end-user, I would like to work with survey data from both users and non-users to provide the level of data necessary to make my decisions.*

- **Commentary -** an easy way to *reply* to the performance, offer mitigating statements, evaluated performance, etc. These are text inputs that are linked to KPIs, objectives, risks, projects, activities, etc.

  Commentary is a must-have for any solution. Make sure the commenting functionality supports MS Word content, importing images, and has advanced features. Some users will want to reuse comments they have already written in Word documents, they and will want to retain the formatting. Also, make certain that any comments can easily be reused in the system's reports.

  - Specification: Describe how end users can add commentary, including formatted text, and screenshots of supporting information, to capture insights related to performance.
  - *User story: As an end-user, I would like to add text and supporting graphics to provide insights into performance, results, areas of improvement, and other evaluative information.*

- **Classifications -** creating taxonomies and categories that can be used by the business rule engine. This makes it easy to escalate problems, tag content so it shows up where it needs to, and otherwise, keep the system neat and orderly.

  Make sure your solution has a flexible classification system, so you will not quickly outgrow it.

  - Specification: Describe how taxonomies and lists can be used to categorize content in the system.
  - *User story: As an administrator, I would like to create and link taxonomies or categorization lists to elements in the system so that I can keep content organized, structured, and to provide enough business metadata for controlling the solution with the rule engine.*

- **Business metadata** - we offer a rich tool kit for modeling the properties, or characteristics of all the business elements in the system, such as objectives, KPIs, risk assessments, initiatives, etc.

  Make sure to select a solution that 'remembers' the state of changing metadata. For example, if the risk owner changes across time, make sure it is easy to see who the risk owner was last year.

  - Specification: Describe how the solution visualizes the state of changing metadata across reporting periods.

- *User story: As an end-user, I would like object properties to display the value it contained for past reporting periods so I can clearly track the history.*

- **Assessment -** *Assessment* can mean many different things. For this purpose, consider assessment to mean a structured process to evaluate, rate, estimate, or judge things. It can also be a process of gathering and discussing information from a variety of sources to achieve a deeper understanding or meaning.

  For example, if you want to propose an improvement initiative, you might want to run it through a process to establish the business case, allocate a budget, determine a start date when resources are available, provide a formal approval, etc. This involves evaluating, rating, estimating, and likely involves using basing it on information from a variety of sources and stakeholders.

  - Specification: Describe how the solution supports assessment processes (evaluating, ranking, prioritizing, estimating, and their related workflows, such as approvals, staging, etc.).
  - *User story: As an end-user, I would like a web-based tool for evaluating, ranking, prioritizing, and estimating improvement initiatives, so I can make decisions based on both the cost and projected benefits the initiative is anticipated to deliver so that we can optimize our company's resources.*

- **Collaboration -** Provide an environment where everything is in one place, and users from different functions or business units can come together, and cooperatively complete activities together. These tools can include different roles (submitter/approver), or simply employees working within a shared workspace against a common goal or objective.

  When evaluating vendors, seek clarification on how access control works when collaborative features are used. These are the sort of details that can create problems when complex access rules are required.

  - Specification: Describe how users can select and assign other users to be responsible or contribute to elements in the system, such as tasks, activities, risks. Describe how the solution can be configured to support collaboration among team members, who share common tasks or responsibilities. Describe how elements in the solution can be configured to appear in multiple scorecards or dashboards at the same time.
  - *User stories: As an end-user, I would like to assign tasks to other users to promote accountability and ownership. As an end-user, I would like to be able to share views of an object in the system (such as projects), so that we can work collaboratively on them.*

- **Decisions -** Capture your decisions by creating lists or using free text on your pages. These are useful if you run management meetings in the solution. You can easily document your decisions or follow-up actions. Avoid unnecessary conflict months in the future by driving accountability within the team.

  - Specification: Describe how the solution can be used to capture decisions, and how decisions can be linked to the data that supports them.
  - *User stories: As an end-user, I would like to capture decisions that were made, based on a business context (reporting period, meeting, KPI, project, etc.), that contains supporting data, for the purpose of archiving and documenting the decision process.*

- **Highlight -** Help your users know what to prioritize and give most of their attention to. Use your business rules to help highlight content for your users.

  - Specification: Describe how user-centric pages can be configured (that displays content a user has a specific relationship to, such as is responsible for, or that the user 'owns'). Describe how tables can be configured with business rules to display overdue activities, red KPIs, metrics that are trending downward, projects approaching completion date, etc.
  - *User stories: As an end-user, I would like dynamic tables based on rules that display a subset of data that is of interest to a specific function or purpose, to streamline my use of the solution (so*

that I do not have to go hunting for this content).

- **Alert -** We cannot expect that users are logged in around the clock, daily. Some situations may require alerts or notifications.
  - Specification: Describe the types of business rules that can be defined and the types of notifications that can be sent by email or within the solution. Describe how business rules can be scheduled to deliver time-bound notifications or messages, such as something is awaiting approval, or a form needs to be completed.
  - *User stories: I an end-user, I would like to receive rule-based notifications by email or in the solution that specified content requires my attention, to avoid unnecessary delays for other content stakeholders.*

Solution areas and concepts

Analytics

Analytics are excellent for visualizing data interactively, but not so good as a primary tool for managing a complex organization. Analytics is a necessary concept within an application platform, but it should not be the primary focus. It should serve as a supporting role, often as a tool for providing evidence for decisions.

Analytics sprawl

In our experience working with customers in a wide variety of industries, BI and analytics tools are a modern analog to the 'Excel problem' that plagued businesses in previous decades. BI dashboards are running amok in many organizations because there is no real governance. Any manager can order a dashboard.

We recommend using analytics for what it is intended: analyzing data. It should be mainly done by specialists who have the analytical capabilities, and who can draw insights or conclusions based on what is significant.

Since most companies already use a third-party vendor to deliver existing analytics visualizations, we recommend integrating and embedding these existing visualizations within your business management solution, if they are needed there. If you already have competence in a chosen tool, it makes no sense to introduce a competing analytics tool to do the same thing.

The approach of traditional BI

Traditional BI tools are based on filters, either on the page, or on each widget within a dashboard. This filter-based approach makes it difficult to understand the context, since the user works within the same dashboard or report. There is no path or breadcrumb, and it is not always apparent what a user is looking at, where they are, or where they have been. Additionally, most BI tools do not offer the ability to edit or add data. Any inputs are usually made elsewhere in the system.

Drill down

When viewing results on the web, users often have a need to understand where the data came from. This can be organizationally, or it can be the data categories. For example, if viewing 'revenue,' how did the different revenue categories contribute to the result.

When selecting a business management solution, make sure that end users can display and analyze where the high-level results came from. Otherwise, you will need to maintain a parallel reporting tool to drill into data.

Drill to transaction

A business management solution is not a transactional system. They simply do not require that level of data.

However, it can be useful to query into your existing transactional systems to view payments, invoices, etc.

If this functionality is needed, consider selecting a system that allows you to view transactional records from third-party systems--- without actually loading each transaction.

Specification

When evaluating vendors, check the following:

- The solution has the possibility of delivering business dashboards. Information is placed within a context a business user can understand, such as business unit, reporting period, user, etc.
- Dashboards and their elements have built-in navigation. Users can click into KPIs or objectives to view more information and data related to them. Navigation is automatic and intuitive.
- The solution offers a drill function. End-users can click on values and immediately understand where the data is coming from.
- The solution has a rich selection of interactive data visualization objects, such as charts and graphs, to make it easy to understand the data, make comparisons, etc.
- The solution has rich table functionality, including search, filtering, and other interactive elements to make it easy for end-users to understand complex data sets.

User stories

- *As an end-user, I would like to clearly know the business context of the content I am viewing for the sake of clarity.*
- *As an end-user, I would like all elements in the system to include built-in navigation, so I can easily find content, and easily view more details if needed.*
- *As an end-user, I would like to be able to drill into metrics (results) to gain a better understanding of what the data means (where the data comes from).*
- *As an end-user, I would like a rich selection of data visualization objects to make it easier to understand my data.*
- *As an end-user, I would like rich table functionality to sort, filter, search, and have other interactive elements available to make my data easier to work with.*

Business modeling

A good business modeling environment gives you more than just a design environment, it gives you a dynamic framework that can control how objects such as KPIs, objectives, projects, risks, etc. change and evolve over time. Business modeling also provides the navigational structure, and helps express the relationship among objects (where objects belong).

This is part of what we call the connected enterprise, where anything can be connected to anything. This is much easier to configure and visualize when it involves configuring objects and defining their relationships to other objects. It would be very difficult to do without a business modeling environment. Defining your business model lays the foundation for communicating your business story.

Specification

When evaluating vendors, check the following:

- The solution offers a business modeling toolkit where you can define business objects the way you need them (objectives, KPIs, initiatives, risks, activities, etc.)
- Models provide very flexible metadata (numeric, text, lists, dates, links to other objects, etc.)
- Models offer rich visualizations (tables, charts, status objects, commentary, etc.)
- Models can interact with each other (the connected enterprise)—ie. you can add initiatives to objectives, add tasks to initiatives, etc.

- Administrators can control the behavior of model objects as they dynamically change during their lifecycle

User stories

- *As an administrator, I would like to preconfigure objects that end users will add to the web so they are immediately available for use once they are added.*
- *As an administrator, I would like a very flexible system for managing business metadata, so my metrics and objects can meet our specific business cases.*
- *As an end-user, I would like a rich set of visualizations to make my data easier to understand.*
- *As an end-user, I would like to freely connect elements in the system together to better understand the relationships and dependencies within the enterprise.*
- *As an administrator, I would like to control the behavior of objects in the system so they better serve the state they exist in.*

Planning

While data analytics is generally intended to provide an indication of the current status, as well as provide a history of performance, on its own, data stops at offering users insights. An analytics tool offers no way to change the future.

For this reason, we believe that planning is an essential element of any business management solution. In strategic performance, organizations need to plan for improving performance. Improvement is based on change, and that change needs to be controlled, especially if it involves additional resources.

In the risk and GRC world, risk assessments are often linked to risk reduction plans. These have a variety of names, but in general, they are the plans for how the organization is treating, has treated, or will treat potential risks and threats. These also need to be controlled. Organizations often need to measure the effectiveness of such plans.

Hopefully, it is obvious that planning is a necessary part of a management framework. You should consider the following areas when evaluating vendors:

Driving accountability

- Specification: Describe how the solution drives accountability by tracking start dates, end dates, progress, status, and users who are responsible for plans, projects, activities, and actions.
- User story: *As an end-user, I want to clearly know who is responsible, the related timelines, status, and progress for actions, projects, and activities in the system to drive improved accountability.*

Project stages

- Specification: Describe how different project stages can be set up in the solution, and how the solution can support a variety of staging models. For example, if you want to create a benefits tracking system for continuous improvement initiatives, you may need to propose a project, approve it, execute it, then close it. Each stage focuses on different aspects of the project.
- *User story: As an end-user, I would like the structure and business rules of various elements and pages to be dynamic to give the right focus to how the object is used in its state.*

Connected enterprise

- Specification: Describe how users can link plans to objectives, KPIs, risk assessments, etc. Describe how a plan can be linked or made to appear on multiple pages, dashboards, reports, or metrics at the same time.
- *User story: As an end-user, I would like to be able to link metrics, projects, and risks together as*

needed to visualize their relationships to each other, and to give my visualizations more meaning and context.

Workflow and automation

- Specification: Describe how it is possible to automate workflow related to updating and reviewing plans, through business rules, schedules, notifications, alerts, etc. For example, it should be possible to remind users that a project is nearing its end date. It should be possible to remind users to update the status of the projects he or she is responsible for 10 days prior to each quarterly meeting. It should be possible to send out a notification if any sub-activity exceeds its end date or goes over budget.
- *User story: As an end-user, I would like to receive automated notifications from the system to call attention to activities I need to complete.*

Execution

An execution tool kit is a natural extension of the planning tool kit. In addition to having additional tools for visualization of content that is active within the solution, it offers process support. This can be either through a process engine, or through a business rule engine that can help organize content and workflow.

Execution is where the business modeling and business rules join together to help users organize their work within the solution. Examples are as follows:

- **Content organization -** a location where a user's content is located. These can be KPIs, risks, tasks, projects—any object type in the system. The user's relationship to that object is defined in the business metadata (where they are responsible for it, an owner, approver, etc.).
  - Specification: Describe how end users can easily find the content they are responsible for. Describe how end users can assign responsibility or ownership to other users.
  - *User story: As an end-user, I would like easy access to all content that I am responsible for to make it easier to understand my responsibilities and so that I can easily complete my assigned tasks.*

- **Business review meeting -** a location where management meeting content can be organized, collaborated, followed-up, etc. This can be achieved through using business metadata to tag objectives, KPIs, risks, activities, projects, etc. that should be discussed in a management meeting.
  - Specification: Describe how content from the system can be reused, reported, and followed up in business meetings.
  - *User story: As a manager, I want to easily highlight content that requires further discussion and follow-up on business meetings, so that all stakeholders can be aligned on the status and what needs to be done.*

- **Notifications and alerts -** messages that derive from business rules. For example, if a task is incomplete, and its due date is approaching, the task owner receives a reminder. Or if a form is due for the month, the data provider receives a notification. Other status-based alerts may also be used, such as a KPI has a red status, or a project is over budget or overdue.
  - Specification: Describe how notifications and alerts can be configured in the system. Describe how they can be used to remind users to complete their tasks, or notify them if certain rules are conditions are med (red KPIs, overdue tasks, etc.).
  - *User story: As an end-user, I would like to receive reminders and notifications when I need to perform tasks in the system, to help me complete my work on a timely basis.*

- **Business models for execution -** the solution needs to contain business objects needed to support the

execution process, and these objects need to be connected to support the business. For example, a strategic objective is linked to a perspective, but it is measured by its KPI. The objective may also contain initiatives intended to improve performance, while users also monitor risks that might stand in the way or reaching the targets.

- Specification: Describe how performance metrics, improvement initiatives, and risks can be linked together to provide a comprehensive view of performance for a given strategic objective.
- *User story: As an end-user, I would like to see my KPIs, initiatives, and risks associated with a strategic objective to be visible on that objective, to give me a clear picture of the performance of that objective without having to navigate throughout the solution.*

- **Collaboration tools -** commentary, checklists, follow-up actions, etc. Execution is generally about improving performance. As such, the solution needs a toolkit of elements that can track activities, suggestions, or plans intended to improve performance.
  - Specification: Describe how commentary and follow-up can be given on metrics and actions in the system.
  - *User story: As an end-user, I would like to provide commentary and add follow-up actions to document insights and track corrective actions to assist in improving performance.*

- **Data automation -** the solution contains an ETL tool that can extract, transform, and load data from third-party solutions.
  - Specification: Describe the methods and types of data integration with third-party data sources.
  - *User story: As an administrator, I would like to integrate with source systems to provide timely and accurate supporting data for decision support within the solution.*

Other considerations

Governance

When selecting a system, it is important to consider the functionality that supports the end-users in using the application.

- **Access control -** Access should be as automated as possible to reduce the effort in maintaining the access system, but the access control functionality should allow admins an easy way to override general rules, if and when needed.
  - Specification: Describe how the access control can be automated. Describe how automated access control can be manually overridden, if needed.
  - *User story: As an administrator, I would like an easy way to automate access control to ensure that sensitive information is only available to users who have a need to view it or edit it. As an administrator, I would like the ability to override automated access control for special situations, so that end users can access their content and complete the tasks they are responsible for.*

- **Audit logs -** Audit logs should be web-based, to allow users to view the history of changes to content in the system. For example, if a project manager was changed for a given period, the log should state who made the change, when the change was made, for what reporting period the change occurred, the previous value, and the new value. This is especially important in the risk and compliance domains, where every change needs to be tracked.
  - Specification: Describe how an end-user can follow the changes made to content on the web.
  - *User story: As an end-user, I would like to clearly know when changes occurred to objects on the*

web, who made the changes, and what the previous values were so that I can better understand the history of the content (project, risk, activity, etc.).

- **Dynamic access control -** While read, write, add, delete are generally adequate for viewing content, it is often critical that users are not allowed to navigate back in time to 'change history.'

  This means the system should control what periods edits can be made. For example, if you have a risk assessment, and the current period is Q2, then the assessment should only be editable in Q1, and should be read- only when viewed in Q1.

  - Specification: Describe how edits can be locked, based on reporting periods.
  - *User story: As an administrator, I would like to control what periods users can make edits, to prevent users from changing data in the past.*

- **Object lifecycle -** Objects such as KPIs, strategic objectives, initiatives, projects, etc. often belong to a strategic planning cycle. Content should only be visible for the reporting periods it is valid. For example, if the calendar years 2021 and 2022 have different content, the content should be visible only during the years they were valid.
  - Specification: Describe how content can be limited to only appearing during the periods during which they are valid.
  - *User story: As an administrator, I would like to limit end-users to only viewing content that is valid for a given reporting period.*

Dashboarding and reporting

- **Navigation -** It should be possible to click through elements on the dashboard to view more information about that object. For example, KPIs can appear in dashboards in tables, or as tiles or cards, so that the results of many KPIs can be viewed at once. If the user wants more information, it should be easy to navigate into that KPI to see the details, the history of the data, and to drill down into the source data.
  - Specification: Describe how users can receive more information, including the history, commentary, data details, etc. from dashboard elements such as KPIs, objectives, projects, activities, risks, etc.
  - *User story: As an end-user, I want to easily view the performance details of any element displayed in a dashboard by drilling into it, for the purpose of gaining more insights, or making the results more actionable.*

- **Reporting -** It should be easy to generate MS Word documents, PowerPoint presentations, PDFs, or Excel files from pages and content in the system. These should be richly formatted documents, where fonts, branding, styling, formatting, and the rich features of MS Office formats can be fully used.
  - Specification: Describe the reporting functionality for generating MS Word or PDF-formatted reports.
  - *User story: As an end-user, I would like to generate reports that reuse existing content. Reports should be available in MS Office formats, or PDF.*
  - Specification: Describe how individual objects can be exported as Excel files, so they can be used in other reports, or additional analysis can be performed on them.
  - *User story: As an end-user, I would like to export tables and charts to Excel format, so I can work with the data outside the solution.*

Branding

Since a business management application reflects your business, it should also represent your company through your branding profile.

- Specification: Describe how branding elements can be added to the web interface and reports.
- *User story: As an administrator, I would like to use our company's branding profile (logo, colors, imagery) in the web interface and solution to promote user adoption.*

Agility and structure

How future-proof is your solution? Can you configure your solution to fit your business? Do you have the business modeling capabilities that you need—both now, and in the future? Does your solution fit any longer-term visions you have related to digitalizing more of your management areas? A business application platform should be extensible into any of your management domains—as well as into the future needs of your user communities.

- Specifications: Describe your software release cycle, product roadmap and vision.
- Specifications: Describe the role of customer involvement in your product development.
- Specifications: Describe how different management domains (performance, risk, projects, initiatives, compliance, governance, sustainability, etc.) are integrated or linked within the solution.

Specifications

The specification section contains the functionality suggested in the Platform Selection Guide. The content is duplicated in the user stories section, however, the specification section has items listed as specifications. Most are written to request a descriptive response, rather than a yes/no response.

Human interaction

Category	Functionality
Surveys	☐ Describe how your solution can distribute and collect surveys from both users and non-users of the solution.
Commentary	☐ Describe how end users can add commentary, including formatted text, and screenshots of supporting information, to capture insights related to performance.
Classifications	☐ Describe how taxonomies and lists can be used to categorize content in the system.
Business metadata	☐ Describe how the solution visualizes the state of changing metadata across reporting periods.
Assessment	☐ Describe how the solution supports assessment processes (evaluating, ranking, prioritizing, estimating, and their related workflows, such as approvals, staging, etc.).

Collaboration	☐ Describe how users can select and assign other users to be responsible or contribute to elements in the system, such as tasks, activities, risks. ☐ Describe how the solution can be configured to support collaboration among team members, who share common tasks or responsibilities. ☐ Describe how elements in the solution can be configured to appear in multiple scorecards or dashboards at the same time
Decisions	☐ Describe how the solution can be used to capture decisions, and how decisions can be linked to the data that supports them.
Highlight	☐ Describe how user-centric pages can be configured (that displays content a user has a specific relationship to, such as is responsible for, or that the user 'owns'). ☐ Describe how tables can be configured with business rules to display overdue activities, red KPIs, metrics that are trending downward, projects approaching completion date, etc.
Alert	☐ Describe the types of business rules that can be defined and the types of notifications that can be sent by email or within the solution.
	☐ Describe how business rules can be scheduled to deliver time-bound notifications or messages, such as something is awaiting approval, or a form needs to be completed.

Solution Areas

Category	Functionality
Analytics	☐ The solution has the possibility of delivering business dashboards. Information is placed within a context a business user can understand, such as business unit, reporting period, user, etc. ☐ Dashboards and their elements have built-in navigation. Users can click into KPIs or objectives to view more information and data related to them. Navigation is automatic and intuitive. ☐ The solution offers a drill function. End-users can click on values and immediately understand where the data is coming from. ☐ The solution has a rich selection of interactive data visualization objects, such as charts and graphs, to make it easy to understand the data, make comparisons, etc. ☐ The solution has rich table functionality, including search, filtering, and other interactive elements to make it easy for end-users to understand complex data sets.

Business modeling	☐ The solution offers a business modeling toolkit where you can define business objects the way you need them (objectives, KPIs, initiatives, risks, activities, etc.) ☐ Models provide very flexible metadata (numeric, text, lists, dates, links to other objects, etc.) ☐ Models offer rich visualizations (tables, charts, status objects, commentary, etc.) ☐ Models can interact with each other (the connected enterprise)—i.e., you can add initiatives to objectives, add tasks to initiatives, etc. ☐ Administrators can control the behavior of model objects as they dynamically change during their lifecycle
Planning	
Driving accountability	☐ Describe how the solution drives accountability by tracking start dates, end dates, progress, status, and users who are responsible for plans, projects, activities, and actions.
Project stages	☐ Describe how different project stages can be set up in the solution, and how the solution can support a variety of staging models. For example, if you want to create a benefits tracking system for continuous improvement initiatives, you may need to propose a project, approve it, execute it, then close it. Each stage focuses on different aspects of the project.
Connected enterprise	☐ Describe how users can link plans to objectives, KPIs, risk assessments, etc. ☐ Describe how a plan can be linked or made to appear on multiple pages, dashboards, reports, or metrics at the same time.
Workflow and automation	☐ Describe how it is possible to automate workflow related to updating and reviewing plans, through business rules, schedules, notifications, alerts, etc.
Execution	
Content organization	☐ Describe how end users can easily find the content they are responsible for. ☐ Describe how end users can assign responsibility or ownership to other users.
Notifications and alerts	☐ Describe how notifications and alerts can be configured in the system. ☐ Describe how they can be used to remind users to complete their tasks, or notify them if certain rules are conditions are med (red KPIs, overdue tasks, etc.).
Business models for execution	☐ Describe how performance metrics, improvement initiatives, and risks can be linked together to provide a comprehensive view of performance for a given strategic objective.

Collaboration tools	☐ Describe the methods and types of data integration with third-party data sources.
Governance	
Access control	☐ Describe how the access control can be automated. Describe how automated access control can be manually overridden, if needed.
Audit logs	☐ Describe how an end-user can follow the changes made to content on the web.
Dynamic access control	☐ Describe how edits can be locked, based on reporting periods.
Object lifecycle	☐ Describe how content can be limited to only appearing during the periods during which they are valid.
Dashboarding and reporting	
Navigation	☐ Describe how users can receive more information, including the history, commentary, data details, etc. from dashboard elements such as KPIs, objectives, projects, activities, risks, etc.
Reporting	☐ Describe the reporting functionality for generating MS Word or PDF-formatted reports. ☐ Describe how individual objects can be exported as Excel files, so they can be used in other reports, or additional analysis can be performed on them.
Branding	
Branding	☐ Describe how branding elements can be added to the web interface and reports.
Agility and structure	
Agility and structure	☐ Describe your software release cycle, product roadmap and vision. ☐ Describe the role of customer involvement in your product development. ☐ Describe how different management domains (performance, risk, projects, initiatives, compliance, governance, sustainability, etc.) are integrated or linked within the solution.

User Stories

The user story section contains the functionality suggested in the Platform Selection Guide. The content is duplicated in the specification section, however here the items are written as user stories. User stories are very useful during implementations, as they encourage the team to identify the best approach for solving a business problem, and they clearly identify who is to use or benefit from the functionality.

User stories can also be useful during the demo phase of the selection process. In addition to reflecting the functionality of the solution, they can be useful in determining the domain expertise of the vendor's delivery team.

Human interaction

Category	User story
Surveys	☐ *As an end-user, I would like to work with survey data from both users and non-users to provide the level of data necessary to make my decisions.*
Commentary	☐ *As an end-user, I would like to add text and supporting graphics to provide insights into performance, results, areas of improvement, and other evaluative information.*

Classifications	☐ *As an administrator, I would like to create and link taxonomies or categorization lists to elements in the system so that I can keep content organized, structured, and provide enough business metadata for controlling the solution with the rule engine*
Business metadata	☐ *As an end-user, I would like object properties to display the value it contained for past reporting periods so I can clearly track the history*
Assessment	☐ *As an end-user, I would like a web-based tool for evaluating, ranking, prioritizing, and estimating improvement initiatives, so I can make decisions based on both the cost and projected benefits the initiative is anticipated to deliver so that we can optimize our company's resources.*
Collaboration	☐ *As an end-user, I would like to assign tasks to other users to promote accountability and ownership.* ☐ *As an end-user, I would like to be able to share views of an object in the system (such as projects), so that we can work collaboratively on them.*
Decisions	☐ *As an end-user, I would like to capture decisions that were made, based on a business context (reporting period, meeting, KPI, project, etc.), that contains supporting data, for the purpose of archiving and documenting the decision process.*
Highlight	☐ *As an end-user, I would like dynamic tables based on rules that display a subset of data that is of interest to a specific function or purpose, to*
	streamline my use of the solution (so that I do not have to go hunting for this content).
Alert	☐ *I an end-user, I would like to receive rule-based notifications by email or in the solution that specified content requires my attention, to avoid unnecessary delays for other content stakeholders.*

Solution Areas

Category	User Story
Analytics	☐ *As an end-user, I would like to clearly know the business context of the content I am viewing for the sake of clarity.* ☐ *As an end-user, I would like all elements in the system to include built-in navigation, so I can easily find content, and easily view more details if needed.* ☐ *As an end-user, I would like to be able to drill into metrics (results) to gain a better understanding of what the data means (where the data comes from).* ☐ *As an end-user, I would like rich table functionality to sort, filter, search, and have other interactive elements available to make my data easier to work with.*

Business modeling	☐ *As an administrator, I would like to preconfigure objects that end users will add to the web so they are immediately available for use once they are added.* ☐ *As an administrator, I would like a very flexible system for managing business metadata, so my metrics and objects can meet our specific business cases.* ☐ *As an end-user, I would like a rich set of visualizations to make my data easier to understand.* ☐ *As an end-user, I would like to freely connect elements in the system together to better understand the relationships and dependencies within the enterprise.* ☐ *As an administrator, I would like to control the behavior of objects in the system so they better serve the state they exist in.*
Planning	
Driving accountability	☐ *As an end-user, I want to clearly know who is responsible, the related timelines, status, and progress for actions, projects, and activities in the system to drive improved accountability.*
Project stages	☐ *As an end-user, I would like the structure and business rules of various elements and pages to be dynamic to give the right focus to how the object is used in its state.*
Connected enterprise	☐ *As an end-user, I would like to be able to link metrics, projects, and risks together as needed to visualize their relationships to each other, and to give my visualizations more meaning and context.*
Workflow and automation	☐ *As an end-user, I would like to receive automated notifications from the system to call attention to activities I need to complete.*
Execution	
Content organization	☐ *As a manager, I want to easily highlight content that requires further discussion and follow-up on business meetings, so that all stakeholders can be aligned on the status and what needs to be done.*
Notifications and alerts	☐ *As an end-user, I would like to receive reminders and notifications when I need to perform tasks in the system, to help me complete my work on a timely basis.*
Business models for execution	☐ *As an end-user, I would like to see my KPIs, initiatives, and risks associated with a strategic objective to be visible on that objective, to give me a clear picture of the performance of that objective without having to navigate throughout the solution.*
Collaboration tools	☐ *As an administrator, I would like to integrate with source systems to provide timely and accurate supporting data for decision support within the solution.*

Governance	
Access control	☐ *As an administrator, I would like an easy way to automate access control to ensure that sensitive information is only available to users who have a need to view it or edit it.*
	☐ *As an administrator, I would like the ability to override automated access control for special situations, so that end users can access their content and complete the tasks they are responsible for.*
Audit logs	☐ *As an end-user, I would like to follow the changes made to content on the web.*
Dynamic access control	☐ *As an administrator, I would like to control what periods users can make edits, to prevent users from changing data in the past.*
Object lifecycle	☐ *As an administrator, I would like to limit end-users to only viewing content that is valid for a given reporting period.*
Dashboarding and reporting	
Navigation	☐ *As an end-user, I want to easily view the performance details of any element displayed in a dashboard by drilling into it, for the purpose of gaining more insights, or making the results more actionable.*
Reporting	☐ *As an end-user, I would like to generate reports that reuse existing content. Reports should be available in MS Office formats, or PDF.*
	☐ *As an end-user, I would like to export tables and charts to Excel format, so I can work with the data outside the solution.*
Branding	
Branding	☐ *As an administrator, I would like to use our company's branding profile (logo, colors, imagery) in the web interface and solution to promote user adoption.*
Agility and structure	
Agility and structure	☐ *As an administrator, I want to learn about the software release cycle, product roadmap and vision.* ☐ *As an administrator, I want to learn about the role of customer involvement in your product development.* ☐ *As an administrator, I want to learn about how different management domains (performance, risk, projects, initiatives, compliance, governance, sustainability, etc.) are integrated or linked within the solution.*

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